

# Embedding strategies to enhance learning and teaching in Scottish HEIs

## An approach to self-assessment

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# About this Guide

## Introduction

QAA Scotland defines enhancement as “the deliberate steps taken by an institution to bring about continuous improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experience of students”<sup>1</sup>, and in the last few years higher education in Scotland has been involved in a number of major initiatives to enhance learning and teaching. In addition to the work of higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, much of this has been encouraged collaboratively by agencies such as the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), QAA Scotland, Universities Scotland, Student Participation in Quality Scotland (sparqs), and the Higher Education Academy.

Scottish HEIs also have access to the information resulting from a substantial number of enhancement activities that have taken place elsewhere, for example outputs that have resulted from the Academy Subject Centres.<sup>2</sup>

It is now widely recognised that one of the major challenges facing HEIs in enhancing learning and teaching is ensuring that best value is achieved from the investment (often substantial) of money and time to support development and innovation. Among other things, this involves the effective implementation of activities, assessing the impact of funding, and ensuring that initiatives undertaken are sustainable in the long term. Many HEIs have found that embedding new initiatives in learning and teaching is often a long and complex activity, which ultimately involves the integration of a particular process within day-to-day institutional life. Embedding therefore frequently goes through a cycle which starts with enthusiasts (often involved in project work), then proceeds through limited adoption, followed by the development of institutional systems and processes, before being ‘mainstreamed’. Given such a cycle, without effective institutional support and monitoring it is inevitable that many enhancement activities will fail to have the intended impact.

Following the Higher Education Academy’s conference on ‘Embedding Learning and Teaching Strategies’ in September 2006, seven Scottish HEIs sought the Academy’s help to develop collectively a framework for monitoring and evaluating the impact of their teaching and learning enhancement strategies on the student learning experience. This Guide is the outcome. Designed with their assistance and in response to their needs and priorities, it is likely to be of use to other Scottish institutions, some of whom took the opportunity to comment on it at a special workshop at the Academy Scotland conference on ‘Enhancement and Engagement’ in May 2007.

The purposes of this self-assessment Guide are to assist HEIs to:

- identify and collect the evidence they need to assess the effectiveness and impact of their strategies
- review what (if anything) remains to be done in relation to meeting and embedding existing enhancement objectives
- plan how available resources from outside the institution can be most effectively used to sustain existing activities
- reflect on how future enhancement priorities can be implemented and embedded effectively, in the light of experience to date.

The document is designed to encourage and support institutional self-reflection and not as an

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1. See the Handbook for Enhancement Led Review, QAA Scotland, at [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iler/default.asp](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews/iler/default.asp)

2. For details of enhancement activities in England see [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk)

element in the accountability process between HEIs and the SFC or QAA Scotland. Its use is therefore entirely voluntary and it is hoped that HEIs will use it because they find it valuable in taking forward their enhancement activities. Likewise, it may also be helpful in internal subject review.

The Guide is similar in style and approach to one produced for the Higher Education Funding Council for England in 2006, which has – in general – been well received in English universities. However, the content of this Scottish version has been entirely rewritten to reflect the different approaches to enhancement of the Scottish HE system, and has also been piloted with the seven Scottish universities who formed the learning strategies working group.

## Using this Guide

The Guide and the self-evaluation prompts that it contains have been designed to try and meet a number of simple criteria:

- to be helpful to institutions in reviewing their enhancement activities
- to be as simple and flexible to use as possible
- to be as brief as possible.

The price of brevity in such a document such as this is that it cannot hope to be comprehensive and cover all issues of possible relevance to the institutional enhancement of learning and teaching. Accordingly, HEIs should **feel free to add any questions appropriate for their own needs** in meeting the purposes of the document as set out above. Similarly, **not all questions may be appropriate to all institutions**, and HEIs should feel free to ignore those that do not apply to them.

The primary audiences for this document are those in HEIs who have responsibility for implementing and managing enhancement activities. This will typically include: Vice Principals for Learning and Teaching (or their equivalent); the heads of units concerned with enhancing learning and teaching and/or educational development; and possibly units concerned with academic quality (although this may vary between HEIs). In institutions with devolved processes, deans and/or heads of departments are likely to make use of the document as well. It could also serve a number of other needs, for example: to support the discussions of learning and teaching committees; on workshops concerned with implementing enhancement activities; and to demonstrate to University Courts (governing bodies) the importance of continued investment in learning and teaching at a time of numerous competitive pressures on funding. Although the questions are likely to be clear to the Guide's primary audiences, if used in a workshop context then some wording may need to be clarified.

Given the focus on student engagement in the enhancement agenda in Scotland, HEIs may wish to involve student representatives in answering some of the questions asked. If so, they may find it useful to consult the sparqs website ([www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk)).

Given these audiences, the focus of the Guide is on enhancement at all levels in institutions, including the extent to which those responsible for implementation are aware of the outputs of UK-wide activities (for example, those produced by JISC).

It may also be useful to state briefly what the Guide does *not* do:

- It does not concern itself with detailed implementation at a discipline/subject level (for example, whether an academic department takes account of the work of its relevant

Higher Education Academy Subject Centre), although it does ask whether an institution has processes in place to know whether such activities are happening

- It does not imply a 'top down' model of implementing enhancement, but rather seeks to ensure that practice and 'bottom up' activities are integrated within a coherent institutional approach appropriate to its culture
- By focusing on implementation it does not imply an aversion to risk and innovation; rather the opposite is the case in that coherent enhancement encourages a mature and considered approach to risk.

The diversity of both the audience and the type of activities involved means that the document is not prescriptive about the kind of **evidence and data** that institutions will need to collect to make judgements about the effectiveness of their enhancement activities. However, in general, evidence (both quantitative and qualitative) to measure successful completion, impact and (where appropriate) broader institutional adoption is likely to be at three levels:

- the achievement of the key elements of institutional enhancement and/or learning and teaching strategies
- the ways that the enhancement themes programme supported by SFC have been considered or adopted by HEIs (see Annex 2)
- more broadly, the impact of the key elements of relevant activities in enhancing the overall student learning experience.

Although institutions should make their own judgements about the nature of evidence of impact that they need, they should also be aware of the desirability of identifying – where relevant – key performance indicators (KPIs) in the crucial areas of their enhancement strategies. This issue is considered in more detail in Annex 3 on assessing impact.

With the exception of an optional quantitative activity in Annex 1, the prompts in this Guide take the form of a series of open questions organised into six themes (see the contents page for a list). Those responsible for answering the prompts should collect the data they require to enable them to respond in whatever depth is appropriate. **There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and HEIs will want to answer questions in varying amounts of detail depending upon the importance of a particular topic to them.**

The document uses simple, open questions as prompts for several reasons:

- the majority of HEIs who piloted the tool preferred open questions, and the available evidence suggests that this is likely to be true for the sector as a whole
- the complexity of implementing enhancement activities throughout an HEI means that progress is likely to be variable, and that answers to simple quantitative questions may be misleading
- as the data collected are for the sole use of HEIs, open questions provide them with the opportunity to collect robust performance-oriented data in the knowledge that it does not have to be shown to external bodies.

Detailed information is relegated to three annexes:

- Annex 1 contains an additional activity to summarise progress in implementing institutional enhancement activities quantitatively in the form of a spidergraph or radar chart
- Annex 2 summarises the main elements of the Scottish enhancement themes initiative
- Annex 3 discusses issues associated with assessing the impact of learning and teaching strategies.

## A. The effectiveness of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching

Almost all Scottish HEIs have enhancement strategies and some have separate learning and teaching strategies. In addition, some others also have e-learning strategies. This section enables HEIs to reflect upon the effectiveness of their respective current strategies for enhancing learning and teaching, how they have been implemented, the extent to which key elements have been achieved, and what changes are required to meet future challenges.

- A.1** Looking at our institution's current strategies for enhancing learning and teaching, to what extent have we achieved the objectives and key elements, and what remains to be done? Are the measures we are using to assess achievement appropriate? (To summarise this in a quantitative way, see Annex 1, and for more details on measures see Annex 3.)
- A.2** Where more than one learning strategy exists (e.g. separate enhancement, e-learning or learning and teaching strategies), how are they 'joined up' and are the intended benefits of having separate strategies being achieved?
- A.3** To what extent are our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching integrated and aligned with other relevant institutional strategies: e.g. for research, widening participation, HR, estates and IT? What needs to be done (if anything) to ensure better links?
- A.4** What are the main issues concerning the implementation of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching throughout the institution? What problems and barriers are there (including resource availability), and how successful is our action to address them?
- A.5** What is the effect – if any – of our strategies for enhancement in encouraging cultural change to support and give more prominence to learning and teaching?
- A.6** What changes to human resource management are occurring (if any) to achieve our enhancement strategies: e.g. promotion criteria, recognition and reward, new career pathways, staff development, probation, encouraging equality and diversity, support for part-time and short-term contract staff? What else do we still need to do in this area?
- A.7** How do we assess the impact of our enhancement strategies on actual learning and teaching, and is this satisfactory? What is the value of staff and student feedback?
- A.8** In what ways is the student experience improving because of our strategies to enhance learning and teaching, and (where appropriate) is this improvement consistent across our institution? If not, why not?
- A.9** How effectively do we encourage innovation in learning and teaching outside our planned strategy?
- A.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to review the effectiveness of our institution's current strategies to enhance learning and teaching?

## B. Engaging with the Scottish enhancement themes

All Scottish HEIs have been active in the programme of enhancement themes as supported by SFC and QAA Scotland and co-ordinated by SHEEC. This section enables HEIs to reflect upon how successfully they have engaged with the various themes that have been run, details of which can be found in Annex 2.

- B.1** Overall, how aware are staff in our institution of the Scottish enhancement themes programme, and (where appropriate) how consistently are they engaging with it?
- B.2** If engagement in the Scottish enhancement themes programme has been variable to date, why is this and do we need to address the situation?
- B.3** Which themes are we choosing to engage with and why? On reflection, are our processes of selecting which themes to engage with appropriate?
- B.4** What dissemination and support activities are most successful in encouraging engagement with the enhancement themes within our institution, and why? What barriers to effective engagement still need to be addressed?
- B.5** How do we assess the impact of our activities involving the enhancement themes on actual learning and teaching, and is this satisfactory? Where this involves staff and student feedback, what is its value?
- B.6** Are we achieving an improvement in the student experience through our involvement with the enhancement themes, and (where appropriate) is this improvement consistent across the institution? If not, why not?
- B.7** Are we getting robust and realistic evidence on the engagement with the enhancement themes within schools and departments (or their equivalent)? If not, what might we do to improve this?
- B.8** How effectively are we linking our engagement with the enhancement themes with expectations in relation to internal academic review and external institutional review?
- B.9** What plans do we have to make sure that previous and current activities based on the enhancement themes can continue to be sustained and supported?
- B.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to review our engagement with the enhancement themes?

## C. Using resources other than our own to enhance learning and teaching

In addition to the resources produced by individual HEIs, much is available from multiple sources in higher education in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond. This section enables the institution to reflect upon the extent to which it has used relevant external resources.

- C.1** Does our enhancement strategy encourage staff to engage with and use resources and learning materials available outside our institution?
- C.2** Does our HEI have an effective means of identifying relevant external resources to enhance learning and teaching? How well do we provide support for staff in coping with 'information overload' by sifting potentially useful resources from a large amount of less helpful or relevant material?
- C.3** Within Scotland, are we using available resources? For example, sparqs ([www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk)) produces materials on supporting student engagement within institutions, Universities Scotland Race Equality Toolkit ([www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit](http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/raceequalitytoolkit)) is of relevance to international students and many HEIs have resources available on their websites (e.g. the Learning and Teaching Centre at the University of Glasgow – [www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching](http://www.gla.ac.uk/services/learningteaching)).
- C.4** How well do we ensure that our staff are engaging with the Academy's Subject Centres? What action do we need to take to encourage more effective engagement?
- C.5** The Academy also produces a range of material and advice on generic cross-cutting themes (e.g. employability). How effective are we in ensuring best use of these resources, and what more might we do to increase awareness of them within our institution?
- C.6** A number of resources are being produced by CETLs and FDTL projects in other parts of the UK. How do we ensure we are aware and take advantage of these?
- C.7** JISC ([www.jisc.ac.uk](http://www.jisc.ac.uk)) is also an important provider of services that can enhance learning and teaching. How well do we ensure that both our institution as a whole and also our subject departments (or equivalent) take advantage of its work? Is there any action we need to take?
- C.8** There are also relevant international sources on enhancing learning and teaching (for example the Carrick Institute in Australia – [www.carrickinstitute.edu.au](http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au)). To what extent does our institution know of them and use them?
- C.9** What other major external sources of support and resources are there of particular relevance to enhancement in our institution, and are we using them effectively?
- C.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to review our engagement with relevant work and resources elsewhere that might support the enhancement of learning and teaching?

## D. Enhancing learning and teaching in our external partnership and collaborative provision

Most HEIs in Scotland are involved in various forms of external partnership or collaborative provision. This section enables the institution to reflect upon the extent to which it is applying the issues raised above to its partnership provision. The section is intended to cover all kinds of collaborations and partnerships, e.g. cross-institutional; international collaborations; where higher education is taught on franchised programmes in FE colleges; and so on.

- D.1** What are the educational and academic benefits we expect to obtain from our partnership and collaborative activities, and are they being realised? If not, why not?
- D.2** To what extent do our current strategies for enhancing learning and teaching take full account of partnership activities? If not, what remains to be done?
- D.3** In practice what is the effect – if any – of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching in encouraging more prominence for enhancement within partnership provision?
- D.4** What are the main issues concerning the implementation of our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching in partnership provision? What problems are occurring, and how successful is the action we are taking?
- D.5** Is our institution consistent in the way we operate partnership provision, and do our students who may be studying elsewhere get a broadly comparable learning experience?
- D.6** What mechanisms do we use to assess the impact of our enhancement strategies on actual learning and teaching in partner institutions teaching our programmes, and are these satisfactory?
- D.7** Is our approach to engaging students in the determination of our enhancement strategy with partner institutions effective, and what changes might we make? In particular, how effective are our arrangements for understanding and supporting transition?
- D.8** In what ways is the experience of our students in partner institutions being enhanced because of our strategies to enhance learning and teaching, and is this improvement consistent across partners? If not, why not?
- D.9** Are our off-campus students getting access to the same standard of support and services as our on-campus students (e.g. access to library and electronic resources)? If not, why not?
- D.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to review our engagement with the enhancement of learning and teaching in partnership or collaborative activities?

## E. The engagement of students

The engagement of students is currently a major theme in Scottish higher education, and this section concerns how institutions engage students in the enhancement of learning and teaching. For the sake of completeness some of the questions below partially duplicate some in other sections of this Guide.<sup>3</sup>

- E.1** Is our approach to engaging students in the determination and implementation of our enhancement strategy effective, and what changes might we make based on our recent experience, for example in how we communicate our strategy?
- E.2** Overall, how effective is student involvement in our decision-making processes concerning learning and teaching, and what – if anything – might we do to strengthen it?
- E.3** How effectively do we engage our students in determining the priorities we set in relation to Scottish enhancement themes?
- E.4** Can we be sure that our current approaches to getting student engagement in the enhancement of learning and teaching take proper account of the diversity of our student population, for example adult, part-time, international, work-based etc?
- E.5** Within Scotland, sparqs produces materials on supporting student engagement within institutions. To what extent do we use sparqs' material, and what action – if any – do we need to take to extend its use within the whole institution? (Partially duplicates question C.3.)
- E.6** If our institution has a significant number of international students, how effectively do we engage them in reviewing their educational experience and then planning its enhancement?
- E.7** How effectively do we engage our students in planning the enhancement of transition to HE study?
- E.8** Is our approach to engaging students in the determination of our enhancement strategy with partner institutions effective, and what changes might we make? (Partially duplicates D.7.)
- E.9** If our institution uses third party private providers for delivering some elements of our programmes (e.g. preparatory language skills), how can we be sure that the methods of instruction that may be used do not give rise to unrealistic expectations from students about their subsequent study with us?
- E.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to review the way we engage with our students on the enhancement of learning and teaching?

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3. Further information on student engagement in Scotland can be found at [www.sparqs.org.uk](http://www.sparqs.org.uk)

## F. Our future learning and teaching enhancement activities

This section enables the institution to bring together some of the answers to previous questions and look ahead to consider how it will engage with future priorities in enhancing learning and teaching.

- F.1** What additional evidence do we require to enable us to predict with some confidence key future policy and environmental factors that will strongly influence our planning assumptions in relation to future learning and teaching provision?
- F.2** When we next revise our enhancement strategies, what are likely to be the main changes necessary to ensure that they are fit for purpose and take full account of changing future circumstances?
- F.3** What are the main lessons that we have learned in the implementation of our current enhancement strategies that might guide our implementation of newly prioritised activities?
- F.4** Over the next five years, what are the main barriers to further enhancing learning and teaching that we might have to address? What action might be taken on each of the issues raised, and how can we get 'ownership' from those involved?
- F.5** A future priority for many HEIs is the further development of international activities of all kinds. What actions do we need to take to ensure that we enhance learning and teaching in a way that meets both our current and planned future international activities?
- F.6** Over the next few years there will be numerous external developments that are likely to influence our practice in significant ways. How will we ensure that our own practice takes full account of the following: the development of the European Higher Education Area based on the Bologna framework; the greater internationalisation of higher education; increased benchmarking of learning and teaching both within the UK and internationally; and so on (add other relevant key external factors)?
- F.7** More specifically, the Higher Education Academy will be engaging in a range of activities which could contribute to enhancing learning and teaching (including – but not limited to – the continued development of the Subject Centre network, and the outputs of CETLs). How will we ensure that our own practice across the institution takes full account of developments within the Academy?
- F.8** How will we measure our future progress in enhancing learning and teaching? What do we expect to be our key criteria and associated performance indicators in, for example, five years' time? (See Annex 3.)
- F.9** What additional measures do we expect to take in our human resource management activities in order to ensure that our staff are prepared for the future issues listed above?
- F.10** What other questions do we need to ask (or what other data do we need to collect) in order to plan future activities to enhance learning and teaching over the next few years?

# Annex 1: Visually mapping what has been achieved by our strategies for enhancing learning and teaching

Question A.1 asked to what extent the objectives and key elements of the strategies for enhancing learning and teaching have been achieved, and some HEIs might like to summarise the answer quantitatively. One way of doing this is to draw a spidergraph or radar chart from the resulting information. Looking at the profile can raise additional issues about the way enhancement activities are being implemented.

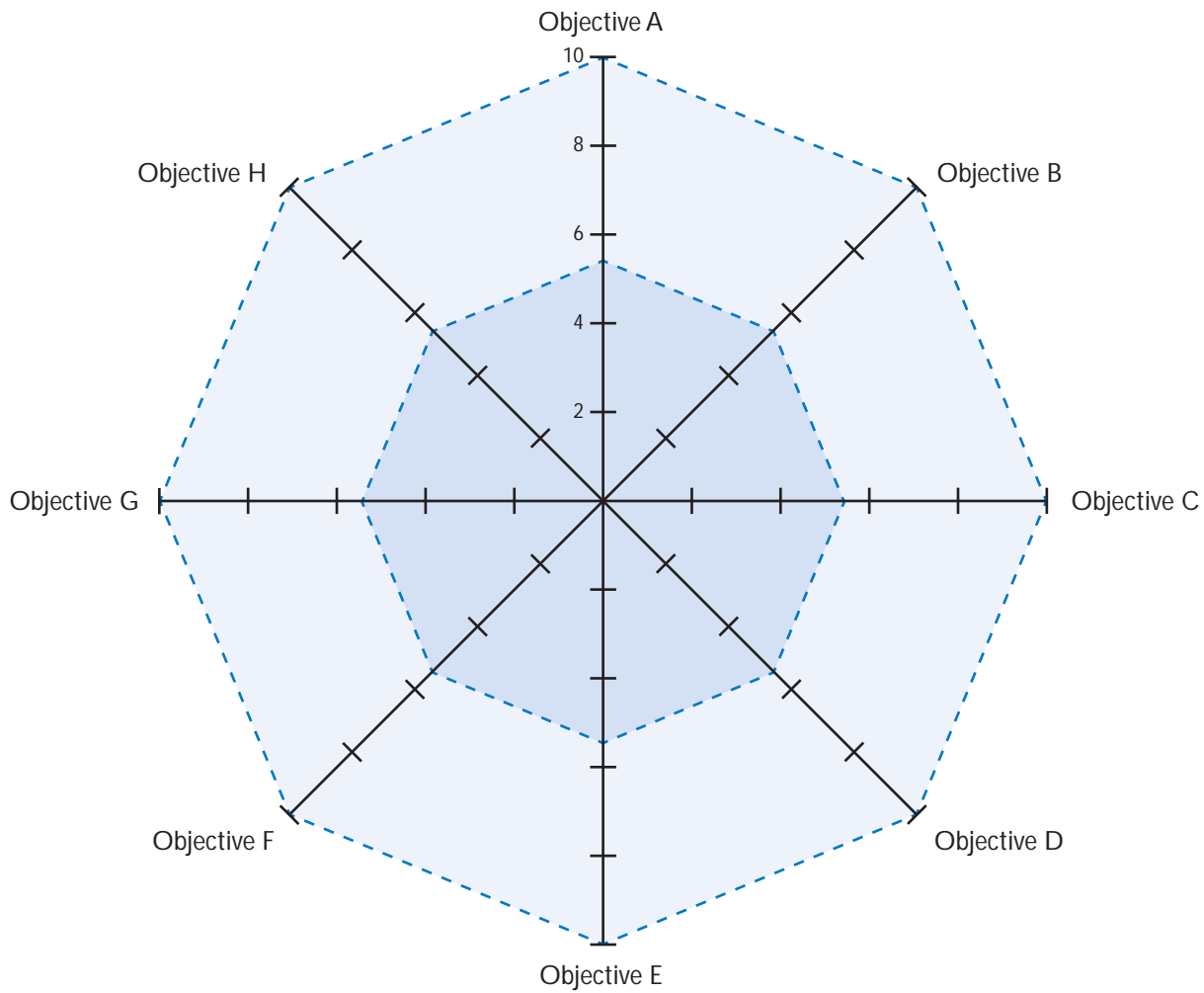
The technique works best where different versions of the same diagram are produced and the similarities and differences compared by overlaying one diagram on another. For example, HEIs could compare the diagrams for different key people in the implementation of the enhancement strategies, or for different academic schools or departments and other contributory services.

A radar chart can easily be produced using Microsoft Excel, and the framework diagram should be similar to the example below. To create a diagram, take the following steps:

- a) Identify the key objectives or elements in the current enhancement strategies (not more than eight).
- b) Rate the successful completion of each objective on a 0-10 scale, where 0 = no completion or implementation across the whole HEI and 10 = fully completed and implemented across the whole HEI. (You can change the definition of the measure to suit your own purposes.)
- c) Using Microsoft Excel, create the diagram. Enter the data in a standard Excel format, and then select 'insert' and 'chart' commands. Select the specific form of radar chart that you require.
- d) Compare your diagram with those of others involved in implementing the enhancement strategies. When you overlap your diagram with those of others, what accounts for the different patterns that are likely to result, and what are the implications for any assessment of the effectiveness of the strategies?

## Sample framework for radar chart

Insert summary of Objective A:  
Insert summary of Objective B:  
Insert summary of Objective C:  
Insert summary of Objective D:  
Insert summary of Objective E:  
Insert summary of Objective F:  
Insert summary of Objective G:  
Insert summary of Objective H:



## Annex 2: Information on the Scottish enhancement themes

In summary, the enhancement themes are part of a five-part Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) which has been designed to support Scottish HEIs in managing the quality of the student learning experience and to provide public confidence in the quality and standards of higher education. The QEF consists of five inter-related aspects: internal review at the subject level; a public information set; the effective involvement of students in quality management; enhancement-led institutional review; and enhancement themes (see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/background/default.asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/background/default.asp)).

Current themes (as at September 2007):

- The first year (see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/firstyear/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/firstyear/overview/asp))
- Research-teaching linkages  
(see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/researchteaching/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/researchteaching/overview/asp)).

Previous themes:

- Integrative assessment  
(see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/integrativeassessment/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/integrativeassessment/overview/asp))
- Flexible delivery (see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/flexibledelivery/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/flexibledelivery/overview/asp))
- Assessment (see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/assessment/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/assessment/overview/asp))
- Employability (see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/employability/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/employability/overview/asp))
- Responding to student needs  
(see [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/studentneeds/overview/asp](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/studentneeds/overview/asp)).

Each of these themes has substantial resources, materials and publications associated with it, and has its own web pages.

## Annex 3: Assessing the impact of enhancement strategies

Many HEIs in Scotland are considering how best to assess the impact of their enhancement or learning and teaching strategies, and this short annex is intended to provide some initial guidance. It is not intended to be a comprehensive account of a complex area, but rather to summarise some key issues for those not fully familiar with the complexities of such assessment.

Agreeing an institutional strategy is – self-evidently – only the first stage of a cycle of activity that goes on to include implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and a subsequent amendment of strategy to take account of changes in need, priorities and performance. Such a cycle is generally well known to HEIs, but is – perhaps – most complex and least well developed in the area of assessing the impact of learning and teaching enhancement strategies. In particular, many HEIs are asking themselves what reliable and robust measures might be used to measure impact that go beyond the ‘standard’ indicators already available (e.g. graduation, retention, and employment rates).

The need for suitably determined key performance indicators (KPIs) is increasingly being recognised in all areas of higher education, and a useful recent report of the potential use of KPIs within HEIs has just been produced for the use of governing bodies by the Committee of University Chairmen<sup>4</sup>. Partly as a result of this report, a number of university and college governing bodies (courts in Scotland) are now starting to ask for KPIs concerning learning, teaching and the enhancement of the student learning experience.

However, producing impact data on enhancement is not without its difficulties and these include:

- ensuring that KPIs and other impact measures are closely associated with institutional mission: for example an increase in retention rates may be an impact indicator in those institutions where retention is a problem but may be largely irrelevant to those universities where it is not
- ensuring that measures are based on diverse institutional requirements rather than those of external bodies. These include not only the HE funding bodies but also newspapers, and there is a concern amongst many managers in HEIs that the potential benefits of identifying KPIs might be undermined if the data became public and were inevitably turned into ‘league tables’
- trying to move away from input measures of performance (for example, based on student admission data) to output – or even longer term outcome – data, whereby the impact of enhancement on the actual performance of students might in some way be measured
- the challenge of data collection, in that the more complex the data, the greater the effort involved. Although such effort may be feasible for larger institutions with sizable planning offices, small institutions (and particularly small specialist colleges) may struggle to find the resources to collect KPIs.

In practice, if they are to be useful to decision-makers within HEIs, almost all impact measures of enhancement need to have a number of features:

- Usually some aspect of the data will need to be comparative, either over time, using trend analysis, or with other similar institutions, through processes such as benchmarking. For

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4. CUC (Committee of University Chairmen), Report on the Monitoring of Institutional Performance and the Use of Key Performance Indicators, November 2006, [www.shef.ac.uk/cuc/pubs/kpi\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.shef.ac.uk/cuc/pubs/kpi_booklet.pdf)

example, just collecting their own data concerning student performance for just one year may tell institutions relatively little about the impact of enhancement, but when the data are considered comparatively or over time progress can be identified.

- The methodology and measures adopted need to be robust and consistent over time, if they are to be meaningful impact indicators. For example, substantial changes in the student population over time may well have a strong influence on some possible impact indicators (e.g. employability skills) and need to be factored into any ongoing analysis.
- Not all potential indicators will necessarily apply across the whole of an HEI; indeed some may be subject-specific. Institutions will therefore need to identify which measures legitimately apply to all subject areas, and which might be specific to individual schools and departments (or equivalent).
- By definition, KPIs should be what they say – that is, key. A long list of potential indicators is usually too cumbersome and resource-intensive to measure, and conversely producing easily available data (e.g. as returned to HESA) may say little or nothing about the real enhancement of performance.
- The measures adopted are likely to be a combination of both quantitative and qualitative. Resistant as many university staff are to the use of quantitative measures in this area, the fact remains that decision-makers at all levels from heads of department upward increasingly want at least some data of this type.

It follows that the selection of key impact and performance indicators is a major institutional challenge and must be undertaken with great care. Indeed the internal debate about what measures would be most valuable to adopt may say a great deal about priorities and institutional distinctiveness.

Much of this is not new to HEIs, and considerable data already exist in addition to that returned to HESA and the funding bodies. For example, all institutions include student satisfaction as an important part of course review, and many are now formally involved in the National Student Survey. In general, students are a valuable source of evidential data, and it will be important for HEIs to develop good tools for gathering usable student feedback (perhaps using elements of the student charter as an institutional metric). However, useful as this is, student satisfaction is not the same as impact or performance data.

Examples of measures being considered by HEIs to assess the impact of enhancement include:

- **In relation to retention:** performance data collected over time on the retention rates of students admitted through different routes and receiving different kinds of preparatory support, thus enabling decisions to be made about what preparation for study works best, and why.
- **In relation to employability:** performance data collected over time on key employability skills achieved by students on graduation, correlated with subsequent employer satisfaction.
- **In relation to international students:** performance data collected over time on the impact of enhanced support services (including preparation for study) for international students (by category and subject), and the correlation with subsequent academic performance.
- **In relation to staff:** building in questions on the impact of enhancement activities in regular staff satisfaction surveys, thus enabling trend data to be determined, and taking institutional action on the results.

Almost all such measures demand more detailed data collection than is currently the case in most HEIs, and an increase in capacity to undertake internal institutional research.

# Acknowledgements

This document was produced for the Higher Education Academy by Allan Schofield of the Higher Education Consultancy Group.

The Academy is grateful to the seven HEIs who piloted the material and provided comments to the consultants. They were:

- Glasgow Caledonian University
- University of Aberdeen
- University of Abertay Dundee
- University of Glasgow
- UHI Millennium Institute
- University of Paisley
- University of St Andrews



## **Embedding strategies to enhance learning and teaching in Scottish HEIs**

Published by:  
The Higher Education Academy  
Innovation Way  
York Science Park  
Heslington  
York YO10 5BR  
United Kingdom

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ISBN 978-1-905788-46-0  
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September 2007

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